

Wheatenhurst Rural District Council.

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health

1907.

STROUD:

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MEDICAL OFFICER'S REPORT, 1907.

STROUD, Glos.,
21st January, 1908.

To the Chairman and Members of the
Wheatenhurst Rural District Council.

Gentlemen,—I beg to present herewith my Report for the year ending 31st December, 1907, including the Tables of Statistics prescribed by the Local Government Board. The death rate (21.7) for the year is very high, but this appears to be due mainly to the large number of deaths of persons over 65 years of age from influenza and respiratory diseases, especially in the first and last quarters of the year. The infantile mortality (115) was also exceptionally high for this district. There was no excessive prevalence of notifiable infectious disease, but measles and whooping cough affected the attendance at a few schools during the year. I have included a special report on the elementary schools in the district to which I would direct your attention: it is interesting to note that all are Voluntary Schools. Probably the most urgent matter requiring your careful consideration is the question of water supply in certain parishes, to which reference is made in the body of the present report.

I have the honour to remain, Gentlemen,
Your obedient servant,

(Signed) J. MIDDLETON MARTIN,
Medical Officer of Health.

GENERAL.

In my annual report for the year ending 31st December, 1906, I gave a fairly full description of the district, including the geological formation, occupations of the inhabitants, etc. The district covers a large area, divided into 13 civil parishes, with a scattered population: there is one person to each 4 acres in this district, while in the total rural districts in the County the proportion is nearly 1 to 3 acres. The chief occupation is agriculture.

HOUSING.

During 1907 two cases of overcrowding were abated on notice and three houses voluntarily demolished. No houses were dealt with under the Housing of the Working Classes Acts. Six houses were built during 1907, and certificates for occupation of 4 cottages were granted under the Public Health (Water) Act, 1878. Building bye-laws have not yet been adopted by the District Council though they would give the Council useful powers of control over new buildings. I would recommend the code of building bye-laws adopted for the neighbouring Stroud Rural District to the consideration of the Council: these are not the stringent urban bye-laws to which so much attention has been drawn, but a code specially suited to the requirements of rural districts. In them are practically no restrictions as to the materials, thickness of walls, etc.

SEWERAGE AND DRAINAGE.

There is no regular system of sewers in any part of the district except at Alkerton in the parish of Eastington, but in several places surface water drains have been used as sewers and many houses discharge their sewage into roadside ditches. As in 1906 so last year the nuisance caused by this latter practice occupied the attention of the Council on several occasions during the year.

Thus, complaints were received as to the pollution of the roadside water-course in Church Lane, Saul, which was remedied by laying a length of sewer and connecting it with an existing sewer which discharges into the main open sewer: later in the year, complaint was made as to nuisance arising from this open sewer, which runs alongside the road and past the British School. In June the Parish Council wrote asking that this sewer might be culverted, but later stated they were unwilling to make any capital expenditure on it. The following September a memorial, signed by 19 inhabitants, was received directing attention to the foul condition of the sewer and the smell arising from it, and asking that the matter should be looked into. The Council gave instructions that the ditch should be cleaned out and that the Parish Council should be asked for their suggestions. They further instructed that notice should be served on the tenants not to throw soapsuds and other refuse into the ditch. Another example to which attention was drawn during 1907 was the case of Frampton-on-Severn where the drainage of the new Church Institute was connected with an old square sewer which discharges into a ditch close to the lych gate of the church: at this point the condition of the ditch was very foul, though the water flowing onwards through a bed of water-cress was rapidly cleared and lower down no signs of pollution were seen in the rhines along which the water flows to the Severn. Steps should be taken to prevent the pollution of this water course by sewage. It is most important that every effort should be made to stop any increase in the pollution of roadside ditches and water courses by sewage and solid refuse, and in this matter considerable assistance would be given to the Council by the adoption of building bye-laws. As mentioned in last year's report the form of closet most common in this district is the privy-vault which is highly objectionable on

many grounds and cannot be regarded but as a source of danger by the pollution of water supplies, etc. That it is a frequent source of obvious nuisance is shown by the fact that of the 80 notices served by the Sanitary Inspector for the abatement of nuisances, 38 were occasioned by the condition of privy-vaults. For rural districts there are several types of closets which might be adopted such as pail closets, improved earth privies or combined privy and ash pit: but whatever form is used, the receptacle should be made above ground and be cemented. Thus pollution of water supplies would be prevented and the manure would be available for use in the garden.

HOUSE REFUSE.

As stated last year the Council does not undertake the collection of house refuse which is disposed of by occupiers on garden or any waste ground available.

WATER SUPPLY.

The most urgent need in many parts of the district is a plentiful supply of good water: evidence was given in my previous report of the difficulty of finding satisfactory water in many places, and other examples arose during 1907. One of the places particularly mentioned last year (Nupend and Westend, Eastington) now has the mains of the Stroud Water Company available, as, on the Council giving a guarantee to cover the interest on the capital outlay of the Company, the pipes were laid in the latter half of the year: this is the only parish in the district which is regularly supplied by the Company (though a few houses in Frampton-on-Severn and Frocester also take the water) and now some 240 of the 357 houses in the parish are connected.

In Brookthorpe, Frocester, Harescombe, Haresfield and Standish many good springs afford ample supplies, but in the parishes of Arlingham, Frampton-on-Severn, Fretherne

with Saul, Hardwicke, Longney, Moreton Valence and Wheatenhurst the question of water supply is very pressing except where water can be found in local beds of gravel. The difficulty with respect to water was again instanced during 1907, when water certificates had to be granted for the occupation of four new cottages on a storage of rain water. It should not be impossible to find a spring or springs on the western slopes of the Cotswolds of sufficient constancy to provide the quantity of water required for those parishes as 30,000 to 40,000 gallons a day would be ample to supply all of them: I hope to be able to report further on the matter in the course of the present year.

PLACES OVER WHICH THE COUNCIL HAVE SUPERVISION.

There are 7 slaughter houses and 30 dairies and milkshops on the registers, all of which were inspected during the year. The slaughter houses which I visited during the year showed some improvement in cleanliness and the dairies are on the whole carefully managed. The farm-yards are generally so rough as to render it a matter of difficulty to keep them in a cleanly condition and the same applies to many of the cowsheds. Regulations with respect to dairies, cowsheds and milkshops were considered at several meetings of the Council during the year and were finally adopted on the 13th December, 1907.

FACTORY AND WORKSHOP ACT, 1901.

The workshops in this district are few and small: the number on the register is 18, including 10 bakehouses. Thirty visits of inspection were paid during 1907, and 5 minor defects remedied on-verbal notice. The names and addresses of only 4 outworkers were received during 1907, all of them home workers for a ready-made clothing factory at Stroud: 8 visits of inspection were paid during the year.

SCHOOLS.

The number of public elementary schools in the district is 12, all of them voluntary schools. The average number of children on the registers for the year ending the 31st March, 1907, was 1,008. The schools are substantially built of brick (9) or stone (3) and roofed with stone tiles (2), brick tiles (4) or slate (6). Rain water guttering has been provided in all cases but one: the defect in the latter case must render the walls very damp at times.

Closet Accommodation.—The present provision in this respect cannot be regarded as satisfactory. Seven schools have privy vaults (one of the most objectionable of privies), in one case close to the school and causing a smell in the school; 2 have pail closets (in one case no earth or other suitable deodoriser being used), 2 have automatic earth closets (in one case with no earth and out of order), while the 1 remaining has trough closets, draining to a cesspool with an overflow to the brook. The lighting and ventilation of several of the closets are very deficient, and should be improved.

Lavatory Accommodation.—This exists at all the schools (2 excepted) in the form of an enamelled bowl or tin basin kept either in cloak rooms or on forms, etc., outside the school. Washing accommodation ought to be provided in all cases, particularly where children come from a distance and bring their mid-day meal with them.

Cloak Room.—The existing accommodation is on the whole fairly good, but it is very cramped in some cases: this results in pegs being placed too closely together and in too many rows, in one boys' school as close as 2½in.—4in. in four rows. Another bad arrangement existed at 6 schools where the pegs were placed vertically over one another to the extent of four rows: the objections to such an arrangement are obvious.

Water Supply.—All the schools, with the

exception of one, have some sort of supply of water, but water for drinking is not as a rule kept in the school. One school is supplied by the Stroud Water Company: in 4 cases there is a well at the master's house: 3 are supplied by rain water (in one case in a dirty rain water tub): 1 by a well in the playground: in one case the water is given from a neighbouring cottage, and in 1 water is obtained from a roadside ditch, while the remaining school is unprovided with water.

Class Rooms.—Most of the schools consist of one large room and a class room. In all instances but three is a wood dado, the remainder of the walls being distempered: in the case of the three exceptions—the wall is bare white brick at one, and a painted dado at two. All the rooms are ceiled, but at 7 schools the beams are exposed and act as inaccessible dust receptacles.

Lighting.—The lighting of the schools is on the whole fairly good, but the desks are not in all cases arranged to obtain the best light for the children: in one instance I was informed that the reason the children all faced the light was an order of one of H.M. Inspectors, who evidently regarded the arrangement for teaching purposes more important than that for lighting purposes.

Ventilation.—Natural ventilation is relied on at all the schools, and is evidently not sufficient in some cases: windows are supplemented by ceiling openings, and by sky lights in one case.

Warming.—Most of the schools are warmed by open fires or open stoves, but in 2 schools close stoves are also used, and in two others close stoves alone.

Desks.—With few exceptions, long desks are in use throughout the schools in this district, but one infant school is provided with the more satisfactory dual desks, and there is a tendency to gradually thus replace the long desks.

Cleaning.—Schools generally are scrubbed during the long holidays and are brushed daily during term time. In only one case does wet sawdust appear to be used in the daily brushing, so that much of the labour expended in this work is wasted: some of the dirt is collected in the dust pan, but the finer dust, including most of the germs, is scattered to settle on desks and other ledges, to be again scattered by the morning dusting. Sawdust soaked overnight in water (to which preferably, a sufficient quantity of efficient antiseptic has been added) should be thrown freely over the floor before the brushing is commenced, and the resulting dirty sawdust should be immediately burnt.

Infectious Diseases.—Though cases of infectious disease occurred amongst children at several of the schools in the district during 1907, there was no excessive prevalence. In the early half of the year 2 cases of diphtheria were notified from Brookthorpe, and the Managers of the school were advised as to the precautions to be taken, including a bacteriological examination of the throats and noses of the children whom there was the slightest reason to suspect. Measles and whooping cough were prevalent at Haresfield in June, and whooping cough at Longney in November, and the attendance at the Saul British School was affected by influenza in January and measles in June, but in no instance was the serious step of closure taken.

ANTHRAX.

During 1907 three outbreaks of this disease were reported — at Moreton Valence in March, Longney in September, and in Stan-dish in December. The last was the only case in which the cow was in milk, and, following the advice of Professor MacFadyean, the scalded cream made from the milk (with which that from the diseased animal was mixed) was destroyed.

NOTIFIABLE INFECTIOUS DISEASE.

The number of notifications of cases of infectious disease received during 1907 was the same as in 1906—10, the lowest number since 1901. The details as to age and sex distribution and the parishes in which the cases occurred will be found in Table III. The only cases which call for any comment are the three of diphtheria which were sporadic, occurring at different periods during the year. The usual precautions were taken and there was no spread of the disease. There was no special occasion for taking advantage of the arrangement for the admission of patients from this district into the Stroud Joint Isolation Hospital and consequently no cases were removed to it.

VITAL STATISTICS.

The farther we advance from the Census year, the more liable are estimates of population to be inaccurate, and this is one reason in favour of an intermediate Census, possibly less elaborate in character than that taken each decennium. My estimate of the population of the district to the middle of 1907 is 5,679, based on the rate of decrease during the decennium (1891-1901): the estimated population for each parish and the vital statistics for the same during 1907 and the previous ten years are given in Table A.

Births.—The number of births registered during 1907 was 122 (62 males and 60 females), the smallest number in any year of which I have records: the birth rate was 21.5 which is slightly below the average of the previous ten years, viz.: 22.0. The parish with the highest rate both average (30.0) and for 1907 (35.4) is Moreton Valence, and that with the lowest average birth-rate is Wheatenhurst. 7 of the births or 5.7 per cent. of total births were illegitimate: the percentage in 1906 was 1.5 per cent. of total births.

Deaths.—The number of deaths registered

in the district was 115, one of them being that of suicide of a person from Dursley Rural District who drowned himself in the Gloucester and Berkeley Canal in this district. 9 persons belonging to this district died in Public Institutions in Gloucester, viz., 2 in the County Asylum and 7 in the Gloucester Infirmary. The total deaths for the year belonging to the district are thus 123, i.e., 50 per cent. more than in 1906, making a death rate of 21.7 per 1,000 of the population. The great increase in the number of deaths is partly accounted for by the large number of persons who died above the age of 65 years—61—which is 21 in excess of the average for the previous five years. Influenza and pulmonary affections together caused 37 deaths as against 9 in the previous year. It may therefore, I think, be taken that the extraordinarily high death rate for 1907 is accidental rather than indicating any special local conditions. When corrected for the age and sex distribution of the population, the rate becomes 18.0, while that for the neighbouring Rural District of Stroud (similarly corrected) was 12.6, and that for England and Wales 15.0.

Infantile Mortality.—The infantile death rate during 1907 was also very high for this district, as 14 infants died under the age of one year, a rate per 1,000 births of 115. The average for the previous ten years was 83. The chief causes of infantile deaths during 1907 were influenza (3), developmental diseases (3), bronchitis (2), and pneumonia (2): 5 of the children died under the age of one week. There were no deaths of illegitimate infants during the year.

Uncertified Deaths.—Of the 11 deaths which were not certified by a medical practitioner (the same number as in 1906), 9 formed subjects of inquiry by a Coroner and jury, and 2 were not certified, the ascribed causes of death being given as (1) convulsions and bronchitis and (2) probably heart failure. The verdicts of the jury in the 9 cases on

which inquests were held were:—1, Probably convulsions; 2, senile decay and fracture of leg; 3, Cardiac syncope; 4, suicide by drowning; 5, probably heart failure; 6, accidentally drowned; 7, accident followed by lockjaw; 8, apoplectic seizure; 9, suddenly, heart failure.



